



1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718

September 23, 2019

To: Governor's Office, Sheena Wilson, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801  
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704  
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office  
Fisheries Division

Parks Division  
Legal Unit

Lands Section  
Wildlife Division

FWP Commissioners  
Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103

MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Broadwater County Commissioners, 515 Broadway, Townsend, MT 59644

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

Janice Miller, Last Chance Audubon Society, P.O. Box 924, Helena, MT 59624

Sacajawea Audubon Chapter, P.O. Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59771-1711

Robert L. Sanders, Ducks Unlimited, P.O. Box 183, Elliston, MT 59728

Abby Dresser, Ducks Unlimited, 240 Jackson Lane, Belgrade, MT 59714

Randy Schmoldt, Ducks Unlimited, 1024 Missoula Ave, Helena, MT 59601

Jeff Sturm, 3445 York Rd, Helena, MT 59602

George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624

Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771

Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624

Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701

Mark D. Natale, 46 Broadwater Rd., Townsend, MT 59644

Mary Goggins, 51 Ranch Co., P.O. Box 1081, Superior, MT 59872-1081

Paul C Hegness – Trustee, 19 Lochmoor Ln, Newport Beach, CA 92660-5124

Townsend Timber Inc., P.O. Box 220, Townsend, MT 59644-0220

RY Timber Inc., P.O. Box 220, Townsend, MT 59644-0220

Beth I. Lamping, 5926 Scott Ln., Helena, MT 59602-8508

Francesca Delger, 116 Delger Rd., Townsend, MT 59644

Sullivan MCS Ranch LLC, 208 Marble Dr., Evanston, WY 82930-2112

Douglas R. and Peggy A. Lienemann, P.O. Box 1226, Townsend, MT 59644

Nancy S. Delger, 258 Wilcox Lane, Corvallis, MT 59828-9775

Jeffry Schritz, 704 F. St., Townsend, MT 59644-2718

James Thompson, 326 Gurnett Creek Rd, Townsend, MT 59644

Boyd K. Iverson Cattle Co., 3626 MT Hwy 284, Townsend, MT 59644

Harley J. Westling, 25 Pepper Lane, Wilsall, MT 59086-9418

Jim C. Stuckey, P.O. Box 187, Townsend, MT 59644

Robert J. Graveley, 2 Riley Rd, Townsend, MT 59644  
Judy Rowland, Rowland Farm LLC, 120 Lower Ray Creek Rd., Townsend, MT 59644  
Richard Vetsch, 120 Lower Ray Creek Rd, Townsend, MT 59644  
Gary & Jean Welch, 47 Riley Rd, Townsend, MT 59644  
Chuck Hahn, Hahn Ranch, 7996 Highway 287, Townsend, MT 59644  
Eric Hamilton, Hamilton Honey Bees LLC, P.O. Box 675, Townsend, MT 59644  
Steve Campbell, Double C Farms, LLC, 3595 Hwy 284, Townsend, MT 59644  
Jeff Marks, 3643 Hwy 284 Townsend, MT 59644  
Leonard Lambott, 8715 U.S. Hwy 287, Toston, MT 59643-9603  
Jason K. and Karen Noyes, Toston, MT 59643-9614  
Kelly Ingalls, Round Grove Ranch, 3436 Highway 284, Townsend, MT 59644  
Round Grove Ranch Co., 642 Monroe Ave, Helena, MT 59601-2664  
Allen McNeal, 101 Lower Gurnett Creek Rd, Townsend, MT 59644-9633  
Cheryl M. Menard, P.O. Box 933, Townsend, MT 59644-0933  
Kathleen M. Roadarmel, P.O. Box 128, Townsend, MT 59644-0128  
Casey C. Matheson, 63 Centerville Rd, Townsend, MT 59644-9605  
Terry L. Obal, 65 Centerville Rd, Townsend, MT 59644-9605  
Leroy W. & Stephen R. Mayhood, 24020 Production Circle, Bonita Springs, FL, 34135-7055  
Mark Ehlke, P.O. Box 178, Townsend, MT 59644-0178  
Taryn Preston, Natural Resource Specialist, Canyon Ferry Field Office, 7700 Canyon Ferry Rd, Helena, MT 59602  
David Nunn, Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest, Helena Ranger District, 2880 Skyway Dr., Helena, MT 59602

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed decision notice is for the proposed potential use of prescribed fire for habitat management on the Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area (CFWMA). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) would utilize prescribed fire on the Canyon Ferry WMA as needed to improve wildlife habitat conditions for waterfowl, upland game birds (primarily pheasant) and big game (primarily white-tailed deer and moose). Prescribed fire would be utilized to revitalize decadent stands of dense nesting cover and other areas of herbaceous vegetation, improve the structure of decadent stands of cattails and bulrushes or to help kill cattails if needed to create more open water in ponds, and to regenerate decadent stands of willows and sprouting shrubs. Prescribed fire may also be used to at least temporarily remove willows and other dense stands of brush from pond shorelines in areas to improve waterfowl access to adjacent nesting and brood-rearing habitat. Some mechanical treatment (slashing) of vegetation might occur in some areas prior to any prescribed burn to help manage/control the prescribed burn.

Prescribed fire would be used as needed around the Canyon Ferry WMA as conditions and funding allows. The location and amount of acreage to be burned in any one year (if any) would vary on an annual basis. Prescribed burns would typically occur during the dormant season in late winter to early spring (late February – early April) as conditions allow, unless it was deemed that another time frame was more appropriate to achieve management objectives. Prescribed fire would not be used to burn irrigated agricultural areas that are cropped by agricultural lessees. Burn plans and prescribed fires for habitat improvement on the CFWMA would be done by USFS and/or DNRC (Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation) fire personnel.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public

comment on August 12, 2019. Public comments were taken for 30 days (through September 13, 2019). Notices regarding the EA were sent out to interested parties, and legal notices were printed in the Bozeman Chronicle, Helena Independent Record, and the Broadwater County Reporter. The Environmental Assessment was also posted on the

FWP webpage: [fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmentalAssessments/plans/](http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmentalAssessments/plans/)

Two individuals submitted comments during the official comment period. A summary of those comments and FWP's responses can be found in the Decision Notice.

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comments received, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision to go forward with the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) to utilize prescribed fire as needed around the Canyon Ferry WMA to improve habitat conditions for waterfowl, upland game birds (primarily pheasants) and big game (primarily white-tailed deer and moose). I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Questions regarding this Decision Notice should be mailed to:

Adam Grove  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
P.O. Box 998  
Townsend, MT 59644  
Or e-mailed to: [adgrove@mt.gov](mailto:adgrove@mt.gov)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Deleray', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark Deleray  
Region Three Supervisor

Attachment:







**Environmental Assessment Decision Notice  
for the  
Canyon Ferry WMA Prescribed Fire Program**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region 3, Bozeman  
September 2019**

**Preface**

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the proposed prescribed fire program on the Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management. Canyon Ferry WMA is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) but is managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) through a management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation. Prescribed fire would be used as needed around the Canyon Ferry WMA to improve habitat conditions for waterfowl, upland game birds (primarily pheasants), and big game (primarily white-tailed deer and moose). Prescribed fire would be used to periodically burn stands of cattails and bulrushes to improve stand structure as needed or to help kill existing stands of cattails to increase the amount of open water in smaller duck ponds if needed. Some mechanical treatment (slashing) of vegetation might occur in some areas prior to a prescribed burn to help manage/control the prescribed burn.

The effects of prescribed fire on cattails will vary depending on when (time of year) they are burned and upon whether they are subsequently flooded or not. Prescribed fire may also be used to at least temporarily remove willows and other dense stands of brush from pond shorelines in areas to improve waterfowl access to adjacent nesting and brood-rearing habitat. Prescribed fire would also be used to manipulate and rejuvenate decadent areas of herbaceous cover across the CFWMA as needed including areas of dense nesting cover. Lastly, prescribed fire would be used to manipulate and rejuvenate decadent stands of woody (browse) cover (willows and sprouting shrubs) across the CFWMA as needed. Willows and other sprouting shrubs will typically respond favorably to the use of prescribed fire depending upon when they are burned. The amount of acreage to be burned in any one year (if any) would vary on an annual basis. Prescribed burns would typically occur in late winter to early spring (late February – early April) unless it was deemed that another time frame was more appropriate to achieve management objectives. Prescribed fire would not be used to burn irrigated agricultural areas that are cropped by agricultural lessees.

A prescribed fire burn plan would need to be written and would need to be approved by BOR whenever prescribed burns for habitat improvement were proposed. Burn plans and prescribed burning for habitat management would be done by USFS and/or DNRC fire personnel. Use of USFS and/or DNRC fire personnel would require an agreement between the BOR (and possibly FWP) and those agencies.

### **Public Process and Comments**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. An Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with MEPA was completed for the proposed action by FWP and released for public comment on August 12, 2019.

The following two alternatives were considered in this Environmental Assessment:

#### **Alternative A: No Action**

FWP would not utilize prescribed fire on the CFWMA to manage habitat quality for waterfowl, upland game birds, and big game species. This action would retain the current status quo regarding impacts of many of the aspects of the physical and human environment. The action would likely result in the continued degradation of habitat quality over time for waterfowl, upland birds, and big game that utilize the CFWMA.

#### **Alternative B: Preferred Alternative**

FWP would utilize prescribed fire as needed around the Canyon Ferry WMA to improve habitat conditions for waterfowl, upland game birds (primarily pheasants), and big game (primarily white-tailed deer and moose). Prescribed fire would be utilized to revitalize decadent stands of dense nesting cover and other areas of herbaceous vegetation, improve the structure of decadent stands of cattails and bulrushes or to help kill cattails if needed to create more open water in ponds, and to regenerate decadent stands of willows and sprouting shrubs.

The location and amount of acreage to be burned in any one year (if any) would vary on an annual basis. Prescribed burns would typically occur during the dormant season in late winter to early spring (late February–early April) unless it was deemed that another timeframe was more appropriate to achieve management objectives. Prescribed fire would not be used to burn areas that are cropped by agricultural lessees.

Public comments were taken for 30 days (through September 13, 2019). Notices regarding the EA were sent out to interested parties, and legal notices were printed in the Bozeman Chronicle, Helena Independent Record, and the Broadwater County Reporter.

The Environmental Assessment was also posted on the FWP webpage:  
[fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmentalAssessments/plans/](http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmentalAssessments/plans/)

Two individuals submitted comments during the official comment period.

Following is a summary of the comments received on the prescribed fire program EA, and FWP's response to them.

**Comment #1:** Individual expressed support for FWP's proposal to utilize prescribed burning to improve wildlife habitat on the CFWMA. However, he noted that due to the sensitivity for fire, that proper timing and ensuring that others are aware of the plans and purposes of the fire will be necessary to ensure success.

*FWP's response: FWP concurs that proper timing and proper notification of fire plans and their purpose will be necessary to ensure success from both a habitat improvement and communications standpoint. Fire plans will be developed by the agency responsible for doing the actual burning (USFS or DNRC). The burn plan for any habitat improvement prescribed fire would consider burn timing (season and time of day) among other things. News releases would also be done whenever a burn is planned to make the public aware of the activity and its purpose.*

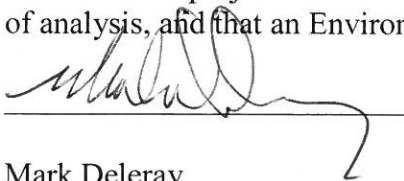
**Comment #2** (two primary points of emphasis): First, the second individual objected to the fact that the habitat benefits to upland game birds was primarily for pheasants which is a non-native species and felt that FWP shouldn't be managing for a non-native species (in this case pheasants) and that it was inconsistent with MT laws regulating wildlife protection. Secondly, he felt that the vegetation species list where individual impacts were described should have been separated into native and invasive species.

*FWP's response: While pheasants are indeed a non-native species originally, they have been in Montana since the late 1800s, and therefore one could at this point probably consider them to be a naturalized species. They are also an extremely popular game bird species with hunters in Montana. More importantly, pheasants are defined in Montana state statute as an upland game bird species and therefore fall under the management authority of FWP. Pheasants have been present on and around the Canyon Ferry WMA (CFWMA) area for a long time as well. One of the stated objectives of the new (2019) Canyon Ferry WMA draft management plan is to maintain or improve overall quality of habitat for upland game birds (primarily pheasant) on the WMA to increase production, recruitment and annual survival. It should be noted that few if any native sharp-tailed grouse are found on the CFWMA because the combination of existing habitat types and vegetation species present really aren't suited for sharp-tailed grouse.*

*Regarding separating or categorizing species into native or invasive species when describing impacts to individual species, that is a good idea and attempts will be made to do that on future EAs related to the Canyon Ferry WMA.*

### **Decision**

It is my decision, based on the Environmental Assessment and public comment, to approve the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) to utilize prescribed fire as needed around the Canyon Ferry WMA to improve habitat conditions for waterfowl, upland game birds (primarily pheasants), and big game (primarily white-tailed deer and moose). If successfully implemented, the proposed action would work to improve wildlife habitat conditions for waterfowl, upland game birds (primarily pheasant), and big game (primarily white-tailed deer and moose) on the CFWMA all of which are objectives of the CFWMA. The analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment as a result of the project. I therefore conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Mark Deleray

9/25/19  
Date

Region 3 Supervisor

